# Civil and Ethnic Unrest

*Tens of thousands of Soviet radicals jeered President Mikhail Gorbachev and the rest of the Soviet leadership Tuesday, turning the May Day parade through Red Square into a ringing denunciation of 72 years of Communist rule.*

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So began a Reuters dispatch describing the extraordinary scene that unfolded in Red Square yesterday. An estimated 100,000 Soviet citizens entered the square behind the official, pro-government marchers and began shouting, "Freedom! Freedom!" and "Politburo, Resign!" and "Down with the KGB!" "A president from the people!" the crowd yelled, while Mikhail Gorbachev and the Politburo on the dais stared down.

## Gorbachev vs. Reform—II

Just to describe the banners and flags carried by the crowd provides Western readers an unusual sense of the discontent building in the Soviet Union: "Down with the empire of Red fascism," said another. "Down with the Cult of Lenin." "Socialism, no thanks." "A Dictator is a President Without an Election."

The red, yellow and green flag of the Lithuanian republic was prominent in the procession. "The Lithuanian Blockade is the President's Shame," read one sign. Another, "Today a blockade of Lithuania, tomorrow a blockade of Moscow."

Other marchers carried the red, white and blue colors of pre-revolutionary Russia. Some carried flags of non-Soviet Ukraine. Some even carried Soviet flags with the hammer-and-sickle cut out, precisely the device used by the Romanians who took to the streets in bloody battles with the Securitate forces, while the Ceaucescus fell.

After about 20 minutes of this, enough became enough and the leadership atop the Lenin Mausoleum disappeared for the peace and quiet of the dachas.

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Events are moving rapidly in the U.S. as well. Yesterday the White House announced that on Thursday President Bush would meet at the White House with Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene. Only a week ago, Ms. Prunskiene was saying that State Department officials had refused her a visa, hinting that she try to come in June, after the Bush-Gorbachev summit in late May. Now she will spend all day Thursday pleading her case to the President and Members of Congress.

A positive reading of these developments would be that the political leadership in both East and West is at last beginning to see the dangers in failing to recognize the legitimate interests of all those who have a stake in the evolution from totalitarianism to self-determination. In particular, they may be starting to appreciate that the issue reaches far beyond "ethnic unrest" in the Balkans or Baltic Republic. Lithuanian nationalists and Russian democrats understand that their cause is one.

In a poll published by Izvestia Monday, 92% of Latvian ethnics favored secession from the Soviet Union, but so did 45% of Latvian residents of other ethnic extractions, primarily Russians. Thousands of miles from Red Square yesterday, demonstrators in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, were marching to support hunger strikers demanding press freedom and a faster evolution to full democracy. As the Red Square demonstrations suggest, many Soviets now hate the very word "communism."

It is no doubt likely that there are large elements in the general population, or in the army and government, who oppose tossing over the current system. Absent any mechanism such as a popularly elected government for absorbing these emotions, the Soviet Union is ripe for civil war. This is an unsettling prospect for a nation possessed of vast firepower, including nuclear weapons. Surely avoiding such a cataclysmic and probably uncontrollable event is in the interest of everyone, both the Soviets and the West. But what policy does that imperative demand?

Ceaucescu was singularly efficient at suppressing his ethnic minorities (ask any Hungarian), and at keeping the rest of his population in terror; his reward was the only civil war and the only execution in the Eastern European upheavals. Civil war is most likely to be averted not by suppression but by accommodation of the Lithuanians, the Azerbaijanis and the Great Russians in Red Square. They all, ultimately, have legitimate grievances and legitimate desires.

As we argued yesterday, the United States ought to support a set of Soviet policies that ensures real reform rather than ties it to one man. Mr. Gorbachev's policy was accommodation in Eastern Europe, but has turned to suppression elsewhere, including the blockade of Lithuania and the use of poison gas and troops in Georgia and deliberately stirring ethnic animosities in Azerbaijan.

In Russia, his "reforms" have systematically destroyed other power structures, including the party, to gather all power into his personal hands. Andrei Sakharov, in his last warnings before his death, warned about the dangers of seeking "democratic change through undemocratic means."

The most hopeful interpretation of yesterday's Red Square events is that Mr. Gorbachev permitted the demonstrations as a tactic to get back on the path of accommodation and reform. The test will lie in his treatment of the Lithuanians. But the West stands warned that Mr. Gorbachev is a variable partner. The West should support him when he favors reform, but this does not mean looking the other way when he turns to repression.